

from our viewpoint...

## Enjoy the calm after the '06 storm

And now there is calm ... after the storm. The political storm, that is. Campaign seasons are like weather patterns: Clear. Cloudy. Mild. Stormy. Hot. Cold. Unsettling. Windy with occasional blowing dirt. And the mid-term 2006 campaign showed all of the above. And them some. It was somewhat of a relief to wake up Wednesday and not see a television ad attacking, degrading, deceptively describing, plain out lying, and in some cases bordering on defamation of character in an attempt to win votes. But you won't hear of any lawsuits being filed, because this is politics at its worst and an accepted form of roping in votes. Shameful, but it won't ever end. As you know, the 2006 mid-term vote is the forerunner of the 2008 presidential campaign, which will include all of the ingredients we found hard to stomach. The 2008 campaign will kick in this week. Presidential wannabes are moving up to the starting line. And if you think the mid-termer was bad, this one looking us in the face will create shock and awe.

One of the unfortunate realities of elections is the aftermath — the wounds that are slow to heal. Elections pit neighbor against neighbor, friend against friend, family member against family member. The candidates who lose elections will shake hands with the winners; that's how it's done. But it will take some time for the losing side of an election to even coolly embrace the winning side. Those are different animals to tame. And it's probably a pretty good bet that many of you reading this editorial have experienced the latter.

The presidential election in November 2008 seems like a long way off. And it will seem even longer as we get ready to endure more nasty, negative, lying, deceptive television ads. And the wounds of the mid-term vote will barely heal — if at all — before the candidates again start their trek to whatever the office. First up will be John McCain, Hillary Rodham Clinton, Rudy Guillani, Mitt Romney, John Kerry, John Edwards, Joe Biden — just to name a few. And these and the other presidential wannabes will campaign for a year and a half — until a decision on a candidate for each party is made by summer of 2008. Many will be weeded out along the way, and those with the money and machinery necessary to carry on will carry on...and on and on and on.

Take a deep breath. —*Tom Dreiling, The Norton Telegram*

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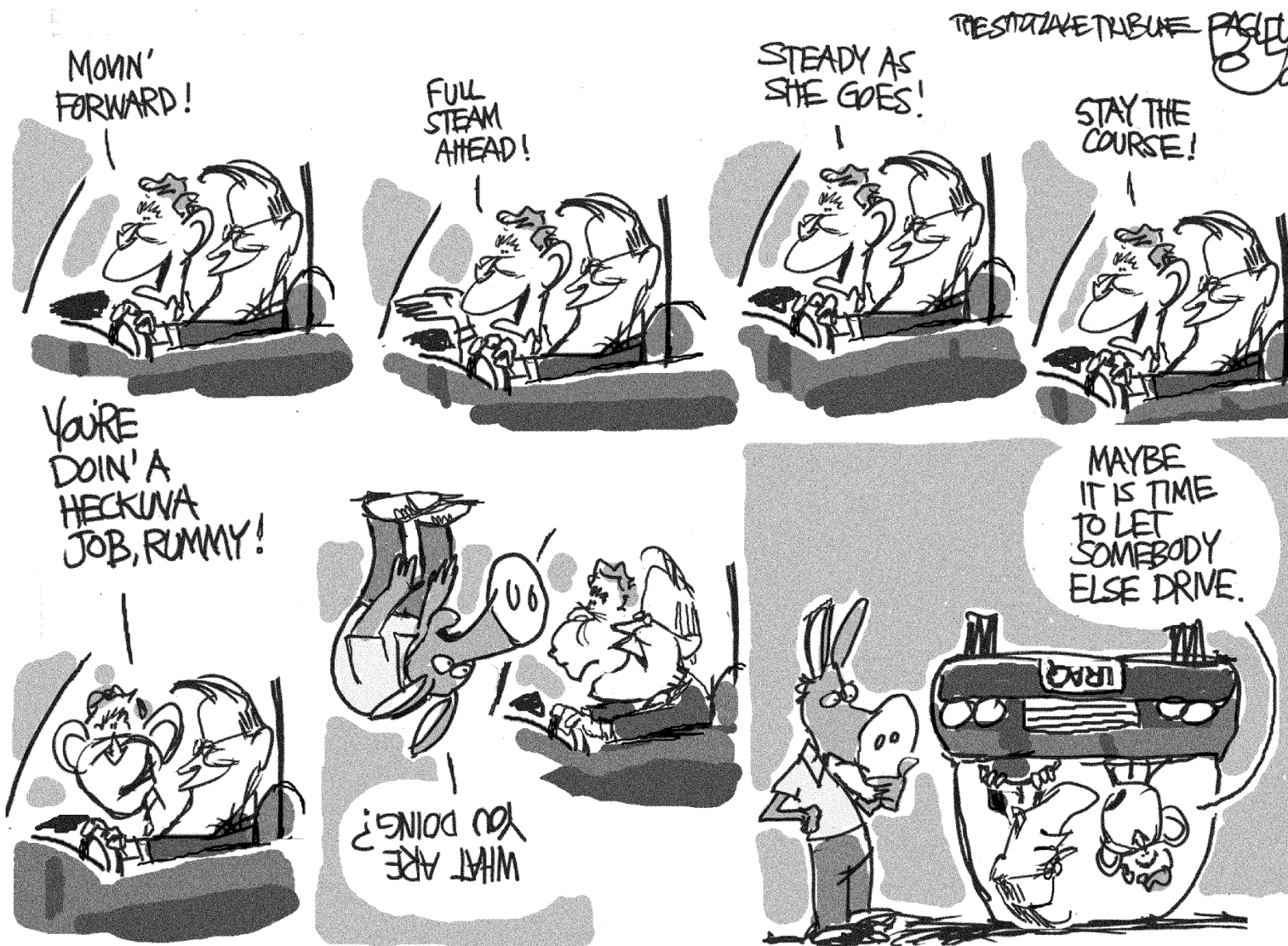
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## Oklahoma is a nice place to drive through

Driving through Oklahoma. It's a nice enough place, but I'd like it better on a sunny day. Like Kansas, it's a pretty state, but you have to know where to look.

On the Mother Road, old U.S. 66, west of El Reno, you start out with the federal prison. Once known as the United States Reformatory, and now just FCI El Reno, for "federal correctional institution," it's a stark and foreboding old pen with high fences and lots of wire. It makes Leavenworth look warm and welcoming.

Farther west, the business route curves back to the freeway and the Mother Road angles straight for Amarillo. The old slab has weathered 30-some years of light traffic well. And it's busy today; must be lots of people going to town.

The road cuts across farm country, straight as an arrow, then curves and dips through a pretty valley. Dirt is red.

How'd they do that, anyway? The dirt isn't red in southern Kansas. Cross the Red River and climb the next hill into Texas; the dirt is brown. East to west across Oklahoma, the dirt is red.



## steve haynes

- along the sappa

My brother says, only half in jest, that they just drew a line around wherever the dirt was red, and said: "That's not worth anything. Give it to the Indians."

Of course, if we'd have known about the oil, we'd have kept the mineral rights.

We think of Oklahoma as plains and rolling hills; at least I do, but the place is lousy with mountain ranges, from the Ouachitas and Ozarks in the east to the Wichita and Quartz mountains of the southwest. It's not just flat.

There's plenty of hill country in between. In the south are the Arbuckles, almost mini-mountains that exhibit perfectly the folded rock layers from your high school geology text.

The only way to really see them is from the train to Fort Worth, along the river, which cuts deepest through the range.

Out west, toward the Panhandle, the coun-

try is empty, grand and desolate. Trains fly through, carrying boxes from the Orient to Chicago and trailers full of packages for Los Angeles. They no longer stop to take water or pick up a load of cattle, not if they can help it.

What passes for mountains out there are barren mesas that stretch for miles, rugged and impressive, but not the Rockies. Not even the Ozarks.

The drive goes on forever — really forever if you want to traipse through the Panhandle, that largely empty strip of land that Texas had to forego because it was north of the Mason-Dixon line. It's all vast spaces and distant hills and big valleys with little sandy rivers.

And then you are in Kansas, in hill country that's good for raising cattle and little more, but beautiful all the same.

There's history out here in the red-dirt country, from trail drives to Indian reservations to one of Custer's first stands, where his troops massacred the Cheyenne and Comanche along the Washita.

Lots of beauty. Lots of space. I'd go back some day, but it was good to be past the red dirt and headed home.

## Lou Dobbs is mad



## bill steigerwald

- newsmakers

ruptcy law, in which the credit card companies actually wrote the legislation.

Q: Is it not true, however, that generally the middle class is better off today than it was a generation ago — more income, bigger homes, better cars, computers, etc.?

A: More Americans own homes but they have the lowest amount of equity in their homes in history. More middle-class families are living less in their homes than they are on their homes. By that I mean taking home-equity loans to make up for what have been stagnant wages, refinancing their homes, trying to keep up with rapidly escalating health care costs, tuition costs for their children in public universities, for crying out loud. The middle class has, if you will, more toys and trinkets but far less in the way of leisure time and peace of mind.

Q: How do you define your politics and economics?

A: My economics are not faith-based, as are those of both political parties who embrace free trade that leads to 30 consecutive years of trade deficits. I believe in our free-enterprise democracy. I'm a capitalist, but I disdain those who support unfettered capitalism. As for my politics, as I say in the book, I am unaffiliated, independent and I can't take seriously either Republicans or Democrats who take themselves seriously because neither the Democratic Party nor the Republican Party takes seriously our middle class or their obligation to the common

good and the national interest.

Q: A libertarian would argue that the cause of many of these problems and the suffering of the middle class are a result of too much Big Government — too much taxes, too much subsidies, too much corporate welfare, etc. Does any of that ring true to you?

A: I think certainly some of that is absolutely true, but we come at it from quite different directions. Each of those is an outgrowth of the overwhelming political dominance of corporate America. Corporate America is in the same stage of excess that labor unions were in 30 years ago and I believe that as middle-class America asserts itself, its interests and its needs, and insists on representation in Washington, you will see America return to a regard of its people as citizens first and consumers secondarily, and a general view of this country first as a nation rather than a marketplace.

Q: If neither the Republican Party nor the Democrat Party seems to give a damn about the middle class, or both seem happy to abuse it, what's the solution?

A: I believe truly that the first thing that middle-class Americans have to do is serve notice on both the Republican National Committee and the Democratic National Committee that they won't be played for fools any longer. I urge every American, whether he or she is going to vote Republican or Democrat, to register as an independent and push away what are really marketing enterprises rather than political parties that are more about branding than they are about governance.

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